

Resonate

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The Siren of the Hills

The bell struck five elongated vowels which resonated for some time after the crescendo of the serenade. He lay still for a moment, his eyes searching the ceiling. The dense morning air was filled with a single unanswered call of a raven as Andrew finally rose from his bed. Holding his breath, desperate to keep hold of the silence of the moment, he turned his head with the utmost passiveness, surveying the room. The tap of his feet touching the smooth wooden floor broke the silence. He exhaled. He pushed himself off the bed and walked to the window. Leaning forward, his breath fogged up the glass as he stared both at and through it, revealing part of a message that must have been written with a finger some indeterminate number of years before. He tugged his sleeve down, stretching it out and bunching it up in his fist, and wiped the window clean. The squeal of moist cloth against glass was a forgotten sound in the room, heard but not dwelt on. Holding his breath once more, he peered through the glass, the image distorted by the waves in the pane attesting to the window's age. The fog gripped the landscape, drifting on through even the forest, or at least however far he could see into it, which wasn't a great length. In the distance, a hill poked its head above the soupy expanse. There were a few more hills beyond it, but none he could see quite so well. It was there, on top of the near hill, that he imagined her. She'd be sitting, poetically facing the other direction, a wool shawl draped over her shoulders. She'd be wearing jeans and boots. If the grass weren't so wet and cold she'd be barefoot, no doubt. She'd have on an oversized sweater, with nothing besides the shawl over or under it, despite the early-morning chill.

He turned to his desk and sat down. The once-rough wood of the chair was smooth after constant years of use and the bone-dry joints eagerly let out a creak with each shift of weight as if it were good news that just screamed to be shared. He pulled out a notepad—

rough around the edges from being thoughtlessly shoved into and yanked out of a bag day after day—and a pencil, attempting to write something about the morning, but after a few failed attempts he instead wrote a letter home, detailing how well his courses were going, how much he liked his professors except for the one, the quirks of his friends that would endear them to his parents, and all the good clean fun they constantly had. His grades were mediocre, they could have been excellent if he “just applied himself,”—as his teachers had been so fond of reminding him since third grade—or if he even cared. He couldn’t honestly say much about his professors if he wanted to, he never paid much attention to them in class nor they him, the latter by design. His friends were alright, nothing spectacular, none whom he was completely sure would throw themselves into a fire for him if he asked, and the fun that teenage boys had was rarely the good clean kind that they all promised their parents. But he wrote the letter anyways, with all the sincerity he could muster, which always turned out to be too much. His family ended up being ever so enthusiastic to hear the same news a second or third time whenever he was home. He walked out into the hall, leaving his door open in deference to those who might be disturbed by the noise of its opening and closing, and headed down towards the kitchen. He put a kettle of water on the stove, lit it, and went back to his room to finish the letter. When he heard the low whistle of the water boiling, he decided it was as good a place as any to end the letter and signed it “All my love,” a phrase which to him meant relatively little but which he knew would make his parents smile. He poured himself some tea, put the burner on low after replacing the kettle—he had made quite a bit, the other boys would be awake soon and the older ones would doubtless want some too—, and returned to his desk, closing his door with delicacy. He sat down, the wood creaking and groaning below him, and leaned back, peering out the window. Only when he held a sip of tea in his mouth while he was putting his mug down was it quiet enough to hear

that it was raining. It was then that he actually focused on what he saw instead of relaxing his eyes and staring vacantly. The fog had turned to a lighter mist and had cleared somewhat. More of the hills were visible, their caps deceptively small atop their expansive bases. He wondered where Lindsay had gone for a brief moment before realizing that he had just imagined her sitting alone on top of the hill. The bell tower began its sixth morning serenade. It rang out louder without the damp and foggy morning air hugging at every sound. The din that only a boy's dormitory could produce was beginning. The noise was unmistakable: creaks of beds, whispers of voices, quiet unlatching of doors; the dorm was waking up.

He slid out of his pajamas and into slacks and a shirt. He draped a tie around his neck, tossed his jacket onto the bed, and was putting socks on when a knock sounded at his door. "Yeah."

"Did you just wake up or something?" the other boy said as he swung the door open and took a step into the room. He spotted the mug and freshly written letter, pencil laid across it like a badge of honor. "Oh. Well, come on."

"Just wait a minute, will you?" He pulled up the second sock and slipped into his shoes, tying one as he tried to wiggle his foot into the other rather unsuccessfully. In a short few seconds he had them both tied, his jacket on, and was on his way out. He grabbed his books off the desk by the door as he hustled by and tossed them on the stack under the other boy's arm. His cravat was a simple matter and was properly tied by the time the two reached the end of the hallway. He took his books back and the two bounded down two half-flights of stairs and into the common room. A professor was reading the newspaper and a underclassman ran past them shouting for his friends to wait. The room was otherwise empty, the lights still mostly off, leaving it a gloomy place.

The two boys pushed the massive wooden door open, shared a look of frustration and then of resignation. “Will, what do you think the weather is going to be today?”

“Sunny. Warm.” He said with a sly grin, feigning optimism.

“Right.”